XII
TEN BASES OF MERITORIOUS ACTION

PART ONE: THE *DANA* GROUP

CONTENTS

1. Giving (*Dana*)

Dana literally means **giving.** The practice of *dana* is universally recognized as one of the most basic virtues. Although not a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path or a requisite of enlightenment, yet it claims a place of special eminence in the Buddha's teaching, being the beginning of the path to liberation. When the Buddha preaches to a newcomer, he starts his graduated teaching with an exposition on the virtues of giving (*danakatha*). Only after the person has come to appreciate this virtue would he introduce the other aspects of his teaching. Giving is the first of the Ten *Paramis* perfected by a Buddha. Among the Ten Bases of Meritorious Action, giving also comes first. Therefore, in the march towards enlightenment, one initially has to practise giving. This is because it is the best weapon against greed, the main cause of our suffering. Second, giving accompanied by wholesome volitions will lead to happy rebirth and less suffering in our next life. Third and most important, when giving is accompanied by the intention for the noble state, it acts as a condition for the development of morality, concentration and wisdom, the three stages of the Noble Eightfold Path that lead to the end of suffering.

2. Factors that Strengthen the Beneficial Results of *Dana*

The cultivation of merits is like farming. According to the Manual of Right Views by the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, for the fructification of the cultivation, there are several causes or conditions for success:

i) Root (*Hetu*) cause
ii) Supporting (*Paccaya*) cause
iii) Constituent (*Sambhara*) cause

A **wise cultivator** will always choose the **best quality seeds** to sow. He will choose **good, fertile land** to till and plant his crop. He will also choose the **proper season** to ensure adequate rainfall, sunlight,

wind, etc. for the plants to grow and ripen. In this way, he will be able to get a **good harvest**. Similarly, the act of giving involves three factors, namely:

- Volition of the donor must be accompanied by two or three of the **wholesome roots**, which are the **root causes (*hetu*)**
- Purity of the recipient which is the **supporting cause (*paccaya*)**
- Kind & size of the gift which is the **constituent cause (*sambhara*)**

3. Volition of Donor

The volition of the donor is the most important factor. It is the root cause without which no act of giving can be accomplished. It is like the seeds without which there is no crop to plant. As the crop yield depends primarily on the seed quality, the beneficial results also depend on the **quality of the volitions** of the donor **before, during and after** the act of giving.

- ***Pubba-cetana***: Those volitions before the act occur in the mind during the acquisition and preparation of the gift.

- ***Munca-cetana***: Those volitions during the act at the actual time of giving. It is this relinquishing volition (***munca-cetana***) that forms the true element of giving.

- ***Apara-cetana***: Volitions after the act are those which occur in the mind whenever the act is recollected with joy.

As discussed in the previous section (Types of Wholesome *Kamma*, pages 81 to 83), these volitions should be accompanied by understanding of the law of cause and effect and the donor should feel **glad before the act** of offering, possess a **clear, pure mind** during the offering and **rejoice** after having made the offering.

a) **Inferior, Medium and Superior Grades of Volitions**

Again according to their different intensities, volitions are threefold, namely: **Inferior** (*Hina),* **Medium** (*Majjhima*) and **Superior** (*Panita*). They are Inferior when the **four factors of Potency (*Iddhipadas*),** namely: **desire-to-do** (*chanda*), **consciousness** (*citta*), **effort** (*viriya*) and **investigative knowledge** (*vimansa*) are weak during the act of giving. Volitions can also be Medium or Superior when these four factors are moderate or intense respectively.

Again volitions become weak when the charity is given with the impure and defiled thought which hopes for worldly pleasures in this existence, in subsequent existences in the human or *deva* realms, and in the final emancipation of one's self alone. They become intense when given with the desire of attaining the four paths (*magga*), the four fruitions (*phala*) and *Nibbana*, and with the desire that that all sentient beings may escape from suffering and attain *Nibbana.* To practise this way is to fulfill the **Perfection of Giving**, which is the highest order. These grades are applicable to the practice of the other bases of meritorious actions such as morality and meditation.

b) ***Sappurisa Dana***

Like the wise farmer choosing the best seeds to plant, the wise donor should cultivate the five principles of the **Worthy Person's (*Sappurisa*)** practice of giving, namely:

i) ***Saddha Dana**:* Giving with faith in the law of cause and effect.

ii) ***Sakkacca Dana**:* Giving with respect seeing that the gift is prepared with great care.

iii) ***Kala Dana**:* Giving at the proper time, such as: food before noontime, robes during *Kathina*, offerings to a guest monk, etc.

iv) ***Anaggahita-citta Dana***: Giving liberally without attachment whatsoever to the gift. The motive is purely to assist recipient.

v) ***Anupaghata Dana***: Giving without affecting in any way one's dignity and the dignity of others.

Every one of the ***Sappurisa Dana*** will result in great wealth and prosperity. In addition giving with **faith,** results in clear and handsome appearance. Giving with **care and respect** brings the blessing of retinue such as wife, children, servants and followers who are attentive and respectful. **Timely** giving ensures that the beneficial results will come at the right time and in abundance. Giving **without attachment** to the gift ensures that one is well disposed to enjoy the fruits of one's good deeds and is able to do so in full. Lastly, as a result of giving **without showing off or belittling others**, one's property will be fully protected against the five destructive elements, namely: water, fire, thieves, confiscation by authorities or kings, and disobedient children.

4. Purity of the Recipient

The purity of the recipient is another factor that strengthens the beneficial results of *dana*. It is compared to the fertility of the field in which the cultivator plants his crop. Thus the person, being or group to whom the meritorious deed is addressed is referred to as a **field of merit** (*punnakhettam*). In the *Dakkhinavibhanga Sutta, Majjhima* iii, 256, the Buddha enumerated fourteen grades of offering to individuals according to the **purity of the recipient**. The highest ranking goes to the *Samma Sambuddha*, next the *Pacceka Buddha* and then the eight individual persons who have attained each of the four Paths and four Fruitions. After them comes a non-Buddhist ascetic who has attained the five supernormal powers and who believes in the law of cause & effect. The last three are a virtuous person, a non-virtuous person and an animal in descending order.

The reason for this differentiation is that when offering to an individual, the purity of the recipient is important. This is because there are **Four Purifications of Offering.**

i) Offering **purified by donor** but not by recipient. Even if the recipient has no moral virtue but if the donor is virtuous and makes an offering that is rightly acquired, with good wholesome volitions before, during and after the act of giving, having full faith in the law of cause & effect, then the *dana* is purified by the donor and will bring good results.

ii) Offering **purified by recipient** but not by donor. Even if the donor has no moral virtue and makes an offering that is not rightly acquired, without any good wholesome volitions before, during and after the act of giving, and without faith in the law of cause & effect, yet if the recipient is morally virtuous, then the *dana* is purified by the recipient and will bring good results.

iii) Offering **neither purified by donor nor recipient.** When the donor has no moral virtue and makes an offering of ill-gotten wealth to an immoral recipient, without any good wholesome volitions before, during and after the act of giving, and without any faith in the law of cause & effect, then the *dana* has no purity and will not bring any good result, just like poor seeds planted in poor soil will not grow properly and will produce poor yield.

iv) Offering **purified by both donor and recipient.** When the donor of moral virtue makes an offering that is rightfully acquired to a morally virtuous recipient, with good wholesome volitions before, during and after the act of giving and with full faith in the law of cause & effect, then the *dana* is purified by both donor and recipient, and will bring the best results, just like good seeds planted in good soil will grow well and produce the best yield.

5. Offering to the Order (*Sanghika Dana*)

Offerings made to the Holy Order or *Ariya Sangha* bears great fruit because it is an **'incomparable field of merits in the world.'** Offerings to the Order (*Sanghika dana*) can be divided into 7 grades when the Buddha was alive and the Order of Nuns existed.

i) Offering made to the Order of both monks and nuns led by the Buddha.

ii) Offering made to the Order of both monks and nuns after the *Parinibbana* of the Buddha.

iii) Offering made to the Order of monks only

iv) Offering made to the Order of nuns only

v) Offering made to a group of monks and nuns (but with the whole Order in mind) after requesting the *Sangha* to nominate the number of monks and nuns one can afford to give to.

vi) Offering made to a group of monks (but with the whole Order in mind) after requesting the *Sangha* to nominate the number of monks one can afford to give to.

vii) Offering made to a group of nuns (but with the whole Order in mind) after requesting the *Sangha* to nominate the number of nuns one can afford to give to.

Nowadays, only 2 types of *Sanghika dana* can be performed, namely the whole Order of monks in the monastery or a group representing them. **Even one monk can represent the whole order**, if the donor can afford to give to one monk only.

In a *Sanghika dana*, the purity of the individual monks is not important because they do not attend in their individual capacities. They merely act as symbols **(*nimitta*)** to help the donor recall to mind the *Ariya Sangha*, such as the Chief Disciples and the Great *Arahants* during the Buddha's time. In the Commentaries, there is

an account of one monk of immoral conduct who was sent to represent the *Sangha.* Although the donor was aware of the monk's bad habits, yet he continued to serve the monk with great respect and care, treating him specially, as one might to a representative of the *Ariya Sangha*. In this way, the donor acquired vast merits as his intention was to donate to the *Sangha* as a whole.

In fact, in the *Dakkhinavibhanga Sutta*, the Buddha advised thus: "In future times, Ananda, there will be members of the clan who are 'yellow-necks', immoral, of evil character. People will give gifts to those immoral persons for the **sake of the *Sangha*.** Even then, I say, an offering made to the *Sangha* is incalculable, immeasurable. And I say that in no way does a gift to a person individually ever have greater fruit than an offering made to the *Sangha*."

6. Types of Gifts

The third factor involved in giving is the gift itself, which can be either **immaterial or material**. Teaching of the Buddha *Dhamma* in the form of talks, writing, or meditation instructions is the **immaterial gift of the *Dhamma*.** The Buddha said that the gift of *Dhamma* excels all other gifts. Those who are not qualified to teach the *Dhamma* can donate *Dhamma* books for free distribution in order to propagate the *Dhamma*. In *Anguttara* iv, 245, the Buddha mentioned **five great gifts** comprising the meticulous observance of the Five Precepts. By doing so, one gives fearlessness, love and benevolence to all beings by one's virtue.

Because the material gift is an important feature in the act of giving, the Scriptures mention different types of *dana* depending on the different objects to be offered.

(a) For special observance by monks, the *Vinaya* or Disciplinary Code prescribes the **four requisites**, namely: robes, food, medicines and dwelling, each of which has a wide range. The

limits are set by the *Vinaya* rules to keep the *Bhikkhu Sangha* pure and strong. Lay people who understand the monk's rules can earn vast merit by donating the proper things at the proper time to the *Sangha.*

(b) The *Suttas* or Discourses mention **ten kinds of gifts**, namely: food, drink, clothing, dwelling place, means of conveyance, flowers, perfumed powder, scented ointment, beds and lighting.

(c) In *Abhidhamma*, which deals with physical and mental phenomena, everything in the world can be classified according to the six sense bases and their sense-objects. So the gifts are of six kinds corresponding to the **six kinds of sense-objects**, namely: gift of visible object, of sound, of smell, of taste, of touch and of mind object or *dhamma*. ***Dhamma-dana*** of this type is made through rendering assistance to those afflicted with organic diseases such as weak eyesight, poor hearing, loss of limbs, etc. Helping others to improve their eyesight is ***cakkhu (dhamma) dana***. Helping them to improve their hearing is ***sota (dhamma) dana***. The promotion of the longevity of others is ***jivita dana.*** Among this category are praise-worthy acts of donating blood and body organs to others such as kidney, liver, heart or eyes.

7. Giving of Money for New Work (*Nava Kamma*)

The 10th precept forbids monks and novices from accepting silver and gold from devotees. According to *Khuddakapatha* Commentary, 'silver is a *kahapana* (coin), or it can be a metal *masaka* (penny) or a wooden *masaka* or a clay *masaka*, and so on, of any kind as employed in commerce anywhere'. In modern context, this includes money and credit cards as well. Thus monks of the *Theravada* tradition, who followed this interpretation, do not accept money.

According **Mahavagga VI, 34, 21 of Vinaya Texts**, the Buddha allowed the laity to deposit gold (money) with a ***kappiya-karaka*** (**suitable agent**) for the purpose of providing what is allowable for the monk and the monk may accept what is allowable. But the monk cannot, on any pretext whatsoever, accept or seek for gold (money).

To lay devotees, it is more convenient and practical to give money, as they do not know the actual needs of the monk. Sometimes they see the monk receiving so many robes, bottles of vitamins, soap, etc. that they do not know what to offer. Instead, they donate money so that it can be kept for use later on when the need arises. As the monk cannot accept the cash donation, it is handed for safekeeping to a trustworthy lay attendant who acts as a ***kappiya karaka***. Thereafter, any **new work or fresh undertaking** utilizing the money is called ***Nava Kamma***. They may be the purchasing of food, new robes or medicine, the building of *viharas*, the purchasing of *Dhamma* books, or for purposes of propagating the *Dhamma*. All transactions involving money is carried out by the *kappiya karaka* upon being informed by the monk about the *Nava Kamma*.

<u>What to say when giving money:</u>

"Venerable Sir, we are entrusting this money to your *kappiya karaka* for your ***Nava Kamma*** **(New Work)** such as acquiring allowable requisites. Should Venerable Sir have any need of the requisites, please inform your *kappiya karaka*. *Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*"

8. Gifts to Avoid

The *Vinaya* or Disciplinary Code mentions five kinds of gifts which worldly people think are acts of merit but are actually **harmful, demeritorious** forms of giving. They are:

(a) Gift of intoxicants (*majja dana*) e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, drugs.

(b) Holding of festivals (*samajja dana*) with dancing, singing and shows. The Pali word '*samajja*' is derived from a mountain festival held annually in Rajagaha.

(c) Provision of sexual partners (*itthi dana*)

(d) Dispatch of bulls for mating with cows (*usabha dana*)

(e) Giving pornographic materials (*cittakamma dana*)

Although not mentioned above, other gifts such as weapons, poisons, living animals for breeding and slaughter, equipment for trapping, hunting or fishing, etc., should also be avoided.

9. Advantages of *Dana*

In *Anguttara* iv, 239, it is maintained that if a person after giving, aspires to be reborn in a certain place, his wish will be fulfilled only if he is virtuous and not otherwise.

Anguttara iii, 42, mentions that one who gives alms-food bestows on others **life, beauty, happiness, strength** and **intelligence**. Having bestowed them on others, he reaps the benefits of each quality, in heaven or in the human world.

In *Anguttara* iv, 79, the Buddha mentioned six visible results of giving, namely: The generous person and not the miser wins the

compassion of the compassionate *Arahants* first. *Arahants* visit him, accept alms, and preach to him first. A good reputation spreads about him. He can attend any assembly with confidence and dignity. On the breaking up of his body after death, he is reborn in the heavenly world.

In fact, the Buddha's answers to the questions of **Princess Sumana**, who was accompanied by 500 princesses in 500 chariots, sheds more light on the value of *dana* in *Anguttara* iii, 32.

Question 1
There are two lay disciples of equal faith (*saddha*), virtue (*sila*) and wisdom (*panna*), but one is generous while the other is not. If when they both die and are reborn in heaven, will there be any difference?

Answer: Yes, there will be a difference. The generous person when reborn in heaven will have a **long life-span**; his colour or complexion (*vanna*) will be **fair and beautiful**; he will enjoy much **comfort** in heaven; a **good report** will be spread everywhere about him; and he will become an **important** and well-known *deva* to be reckoned with. In these five ways, the generous person will be superior to one who is not when he is reborn in heaven.

Question 2
When they die in that heavenly state and are reborn among men, will there still be any difference?

Answer: Yes, there will still be these differences.

Question 3
Suppose these two leave the home life and become monks, will there still be a difference?

Answer: Yes, the one who is generous, when he leaves the home life will be superior to the one who is not generous in five ways, namely: in robes, alms-round, dwelling places and medicines, he

will always be provided with in great abundance while the one who is not generous will always find it hard to procure. In addition, the one who is generous is dear to his fellow *bhikkhus* and they will always promote his welfare.

Question 4
Suppose these two become *Arahants.* Will there be any difference?

Answer: No, in the state of *Arahantship*, there will be no difference, when comparing emancipation with emancipation.

Thus we can see the beneficial results of meritorious actions, whether one is reborn as a *deva,* a human being, or even become a monk later. One should always strive to be generous, for he who is generous is always happy, now or hereafter. Therefore, when performing *dana,* we should always keep in mind the Five Guiding Principles in order to obtain the maximum benefits from the meritorious action, namely:

(a) The donor observes the precepts and is of **good moral conduct.**
(b) The donor has **complete faith** in the law of cause & effect.
(c) The donor feels **glad before** the offering, possesses **a clear, pure mind** during the actual offering and **rejoices after** having made the offering.
(d) The recipient is **morally virtuous**.
(e) The materials offered have been acquired **rightly and justly.**

10. Sharing or Transference of Merits (*Patti-dana*)

The word *Patti* here means merit, gain or prospective reward of a good action. So *Patti-dana* literally means the giving away or sharing of one's merit. The *Atthasalini* provides this explanation:

"*The sharing of one's merit as basis of meritorious action should be recognized as the case of one, who having made a gift and an offering of perfume, etc., gives part of his merit thus: 'Let this share be for such an one!' or 'Let it be for all beings!' What then, will there be loss of merit to him who shares what he has attained? No. As when from a burning lamp a thousand lamps are lit, it would not be said that the original lamp was exhausted; the original light, being one with the added lights becomes increased, thus there is no decrease in our sharing what we have attained; on the contrary there is an increase. Thus it should be understood*".

a) **Sharing of Merits with All Beings**

The practice of sharing merits with all beings started as a result of a request by King Sakka. After the Buddha had explained to the *deva* king why 'the gift of the *Dhamma* surpasses all gifts' (*Dhammapada* 354), Sakka saluted the Buddha and asked that the merits of the sermon be bestowed upon all the *devas* present. Thereupon the Buddha instructed the monks to bestow the merits upon all beings whenever the *Dhamma* is taught to a congregation.

After the performance of *dana* or any good deed, one should share the merits acquired with all beings. The mental volition of sharing one's merit with others is associated with loving-kindness and compassion, which actually **strengthens the potentiality** of the merits. Those beings present such as living persons, departed relatives, *petas* and *devas*, who are aware of the good deeds and rejoice therein will also benefit. By rejoicing in the meritorious action, they **acquire wholesome *kamma***, which will bring them future happiness. Thus, the sharing of merits **benefits both parties**; the donor of the merits as well as the recipient who rejoices in the act. The sharing of merits should be done mentally or verbally so that those beings present are **aware of one's intentions** and **receive the merits whole-heartedly**.

11. Transference of Merits to Departed Relatives

Tirokutta Sutta (Outside-the-Walls Discourse) of *Khuddakapatha* is the earliest discourse expounded by the Buddha concerning the transference of merits to the departed. It sets the precedent of honouring and gaining benefits for departed relatives who are reborn as *Petas*. According to its Commentary, those *Petas* who were relatives of King Bimbisara in a previous existence had waited at his palace expecting him to share with them the merits of his offering to the Buddha. But the king was occupied with the thought of finding a place for the Buddha to stay and failed to transfer merits to them. That night they surrounded his palace and made a dreadful noise. Next morning, after the king had consulted the Buddha about the incident, he prepared a great offering for them.

12. For Whom Are the Food Offerings in *Pattidana* Intended?

Doubts have been raised about whether the food offering mentioned in *Tirokutta Sutta* was intended for the Buddha and Sangha or for the departed relatives of King Bimbisara. Various suttas were cited, namely *Sigalovada Sutta* (Digha 31) and *Janussoni Sutta* (Anguttara 10:177) to support the view that '**making offerings**' could mean '**offering food to departed relatives**.' In fact, honouring departed relatives was a Hindu custom that existed even before the Buddha's time. The practice is called '***shraddha***' and is mentioned in the *Janussoni Sutta*, *Anguttara* 10:177, where the Brahmin Janussoni asked the Buddha thus: "*Venerable Gotama! We Brahmins make almsgiving and funereal offerings (shraddha) thus: 'Be this a gift to our relatives. May they enjoy it*.'

As the ***shraddha*** ceremony is generally associated with Hindu funerals, it is often misunderstood as an Indian custom of honouring the departed by making material offerings to the dead. Hindus believe that when a person dies, he or she becomes a ***Preta*,** i.e. a departed spirit or ghost, which has no real body capable of enjoying

or suffering, and is consequently in a miserable plight. In order to help the spirit to obtain a complete body, relatives offer round balls of rice, flour etc. with accompaniments of sacred grass (*kusha* grass), flowers, and sprinkling of water, and with repetitions of mantras and texts from the Vedas, the whole ceremony being conducted, not in a temple, but at any sacred spot such as the margin of a river. On the first day after death a ***pinda* or round ball** (made from rice flour and milk) is offered with libations of water etc. on which the *Preta* is supposed to feed, and which endows it with the basis of the requisite body. Next day another *pinda* is offered with water, etc., which gives it perhaps, limbs such as arms and legs. Then it receives hands, feet etc. This goes on for 12 days and the offering of the *pinda* on the twelfth day gives the head. No sooner the *Preta* obtains a complete body then it becomes a ***Pitri*,** when instead of being regarded as impure, it is held to be a *deva* and practically worshipped as such in the *shraddha* ceremonies, the first of which takes place on the **twelfth day after death**. The family is now formally cleansed. A feast is offered to Brahmins, neighbours, and beggars – even the local cows are given fresh grass. (See **Reference 9** on Significance of Ancestor Worship)

The Sanskrit word '***shraddha***' means anything done in memory of the departed ancestors. One of the daily duties of the Hindu householder is to spend a few minutes thinking of departed ancestors and to do various acts of charity. It is believed that the **fruits of virtuous deeds** performed in the name of the dead help the *Pitris* in their onward journey and **accrue good effects to the living ones**. Gifts to deserving Brahmins (priests) for the benefit of the *Pitris*, in the proper time and place and with faith, are known as *shraddha.* Performance of *shraddha* and libations of water relieves the hunger and thirst of the departed soul during its yearlong journey to the *Pitri Loka*, the abode of *Pitris* or the souls of the ancestors. By the offering of the *shraddha*, the son helps his father to dwell in joy with the *Pitris.*

By now, it is clear that ***shraddha* is not feeding the Preta** to enable it to grow a body. The Buddha would not have approved of this practice. The Indian scholar **Bimala Churn Law**, in his book 'The Buddhist Conception of Spirits' mentioned that the Buddhist

transference of merits resembles the *shraddha* ceremonies of the Hindus in some ways. He says that according to the Hindu idea, the gifts are to be made to a Brahmin in person or even to a substitute for a *Brahmana*, and the merit depends on the number of people fed and clothed on behalf of the departed. The **fruit of the deeds is transferred to the departed**. In the Hindu *shraddha*, some articles of food and clothing are of course offered directly to the spirit, but they must be given away to a deserving man in order that the desired results may be produced. To perform *shraddha* offerings is the traditional Vedic duty of a son as an act of reverential homage to his departed ancestors. In *Sigalovada Sutta*, one of the duties of a son is to offer alms in honour of departed relatives, which is approved by the Buddha.

Returning to the *Tirokutta Sutta*, there is no doubt that the great offering made by King Bimbisara was a *shraddha ceremony* but with a difference. He had just been converted by the Buddha and attained the status of a Stream Winner. So it is only natural that he invited the Buddha and Sangha instead of Brahmin priests to partake the food offering given in honour of his departed relatives. **You can be sure that the food was intended for humans not ghosts!**

The Commentary states that three conditions must be fulfilled for the efficacy of *dana* made for the benefit of the *Peta*-relative:

a. The donor must make the offering expressly for the departed one's sake, saying: "Be this a gift to my departed relative so and so. May he/she be happy" Or in Pali: "*Idam me natinam hotu, sukhita hontu natayo*."
b. The recipient of the offering must be virtuous. In the commentary to *Dakkhina-vibhanga Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikaya*, there was a case of a *Peta*, who had not benefited from three offerings made to the same immoral recipient and cried: "This immoral person has robbed me! (i.e. of the benefits which might have arisen if the offering had been made to a virtuous person.)
c. The *Peta*-relative must actually appreciate and rejoice at the offering performed for his/her sake i.e. possess wholesome joy.

By inviting the Buddha and Sangha to partake the *dana* specially for the benefit of his departed relatives, King Bimbisara fulfilled two of

the three conditions. By rejoicing at the offering made expressedly for their sake, his departed relatives fulfilled the third condition. This way the ceremony becomes a *Pattidana* instead of a *Shraddha*. So the *Peta* relatives of King Bimbisara were relieved of their suffering and attained celestial rebirth.

According to the Commentary, as soon as he offered drinking water, food, clothing and seats for their sake and shared the merits with them, there appeared in that order, water for the *Petas* to quench their thirst, celestial food to eat, celestial clothes on their bodies and celestial mansions and vehicles for their use, whereupon they lost their ghostly forms and gained the forms of celestial beings. In terms of the **Law of Kamma**, it was the wholesome joy generated by the *Pattidana* that provided the conditions for their wholesome rebirth from *Petas* to *Devas*, which was instantaneous.

13. Can *Petas* partake of food, drink and clothes offered to them?

Some Buddhists may interpret the phrase: "There is no trading, buying or selling, with gold or the like. *Petas* live and subsist on what is food for *Petas* or what reaches them through offerings made here (for their benefit by friends and relatives)" to mean that the *Petas* live on the food offered to them by friends and relatives. In fact it is a common practice among the Chinese to place choice food as offering on the altar of their departed relatives during their death anniversary, at the graves during Cheng Beng or during the seventh lunar month Hungry Ghost Festival in the belief that the departed ones can partake in their favorite fare. This popular Chinese belief of feeding the ghosts originated from Taoism. The Mahayana *Ullambana* Festival, which coincides with the Taoist Hungry Ghost Festival, is entirely different, being essentially a 'transference-of-merits' ceremony.

There are also people who believe that unseen beings can partake of food and drinks by sucking the essence (*chi*) out of food, saying that

food which have been offered have a rather 'flat taste'. This line of reasoning is not logical. It is a scientific fact that cooked food that has been left standing for some time and turned cold will normally lose their taste due to chemical oxidation of the substances that give the taste. In fact, there is a story in the *Vinaya* about a monk who lived in a cemetery and subsisted on the food left for 'departed spirits' by their living relatives. Probably the food was nutritious because he looked so healthy after eating them that the lay people criticized him, wrongly suspecting that he might also be feeding on human flesh. Because of this incident, the Buddha set the rule that a monk, who puts in his mouth any nutriment that has not been proffered to him, commits an offence (*Pacittiya* 40). The story certainly dispels the myth that unseen beings can suck the essence out of food.

Coming to burning of paper clothes burnt as offerings, one must realized that even Devas don't wear cotton, silk, terrylene, dacron or woolen clothes although the suttas say that they look magnificent in their dresses. The garments on their bodies are basically **kammic manifestations** just like the mansions they live in or the carraiges they travel in. *Petas* who belong to the *Apaya* (Woeful) class of beings would be expected to be naked or very poorly dressed (probably worse than beggars) on account of their bad kamma. It is only by wholesome rebirth from *petas* to *devas* (which was instantaneous) that allowed celestial apparel to appear on their bodies when offering of robes were made for their sake.

14. What Type of Beings Can Receive the Offerings (Merits)?

In the ***Janussoni Sutta***, *Anguttara* v, 269, the Brahmin Janussoni asked the Buddha: "Venerable Gotama! We Brahmins make almsgiving and funereal offerings (***shraddha***) thus: 'Be this a gift to our relatives. May they enjoy it.' O Venerable Gotama! How is it? Will this gift reach our relatives who are dead? Will they enjoy it?"

According to the Buddha, it will reach them if they are in an opportune place, but not otherwise. The inopportune places are:

- **Hell**, there he survives and subsists on the kind of nutriment that the denizens of hell have. (*See note on nutriment)
- **Animal world**, there he survives and subsists on the kind of nutriment that creatures conceived in the animal womb have.
- **Human world**, there he survives and subsists on the kind of nutriment that human beings have.
- **Heavenly world**, there he survives and subsists on the kind of nutriment that devas have.

The **opportune place** is the Ghost Realm. There he survives and subsists on the kind of nutriment that denizens of the Ghost Realm have or else there he survives and subsists on what his friends or his companions or his relatives and kin offer up for his sake from here (in this existence).

From this sutta it has been argued that the offerings are material food to the departed relatives, not inviting the Sangha for food offering and transfering merits to the departed. If **transference of merits** was meant here, then the merits could reach a departed relative born as a deva, who could also benefit by feeling honoured. However there is another condition that is often overlooked. According to the *Milinda-Panha*, of the different types of *Petas*, only those *Petas* who depend on what others give (***Paradatta-upajivi***) and who remember their living relatives and see what they do, can receive and share in the merits. This means that the ***Peta* must be present** during the whole proceeding to receive the merits and rejoice therefrom.

We can also rule out the presence of devas. According to **Payasi Sutta** (Digha No. 23), upon rebirth in heaven, devas would be so enchanted with the pleasures available in their new existence that they would not want to return to their old homes on earth, which they consider to be unclean and revolting like a cesspit, So they would not be aware of the offering and would not be able to receive the merits. Even those born as earth-bound devas (*rukkha deva*) would be living on trees in the forest. They would also be unaware of the Pattidana and so are unable to receive the merits.

From the **Law of Kamma**, one would expect different *Petas* to suffer different degrees of deprivation since their individual kammas are different. It is likely that *Paradatta-upajivi Petas* might possess some **good kamma** that allow them to be reborn near their relatives. Such a condition will allow them to **rejoice** at seeing their friends and relatives perform offerings in their honour. The **volitions of rejoicing** at the offering to holy personages on their behalf **constitute strong wholesome kamma** and under favourable conditions, can lead to immediate rebirth as devas. Only through their wholesome kamma can they obtain reprieve from misery.

If one's relative is not reborn in the *Peta* world, who will enjoy the benefits of that gift? According to the Buddha, ***samsara* is so long** that it is impossible for the *Peta*-world to be devoid of one's relatives. Besides, the donor himself will benefit by his *Pattidana* because of the wholesome volitions associated with it, thereby strengthening the merit he has already made.

***Note on nutriment**
Human beings can commonly go without food and water for seven days only, but some devas, petas and those in the lower regions (apaya or hell), who have strong kamma-produced matter in their bodies, can do so for long periods of time. The reason is that their bodies can exist for a long time supported only by internal nutriment. This internal nutriment (oja) is what they survive and subsist on.

15. Chinese custom of burning paper money and paper models of clothes, houses, etc., as offerings to the Departed

Many traditional Chinese families follow the ritual of burning paper offerings such as 'Hell bank notes', paper models of clothes, cars, houses, etc., to departed relatives in the belief that they will receive the offerings via the smoke and be well provided for in the spirit world. If the departed person **rejoices** at his family's act of 'filial

piety' in performing these rites according to his wishes, would he be creating wholesome *kamma* that could give immediate benefits?

The fact that the deceased is happy that his family had performed the funeral rites according to his wishes does not necessarily mean he is creating wholesome *kamma*. His joy may be due to **attachment** and there is **no merit** in burning paper offerings thinking that the dead will receive them, a belief based on **delusion**. Though he rejoices in their act, it is unlikely that he is creating wholesome *kamma*.

Similarly, if the deceased were a victim of murder and his son sought revenge and killed or injured the murderer, the deceased might rejoice at the son's so-called 'filial piety of exacting justice and restoring honour' to the family. But there is no merit in the son's deed, which is an **act of hatred**. In fact, he is creating unwholesome *kamma* by rejoicing in the unwholesome act. Therefore one should be **cautious in interpreting** what really constitutes 'filial piety.'

In Pali there are three kinds of love, namely:
a) ***Metta* love** which is free from entanglement. It is peaceful and is the kind of love that wishes for the welfare and happiness of other sentient beings. *Metta* is a wholesome mental state.
b) ***Tanha* love**, which is love full of entanglement. *Tanha* love is craving. It is the lust between couples and is unwholesome.
c) ***Gehasita pema* love**, which is the kind of love between members of a household such as the love of parents for their children and vice versa, the love among siblings and relatives. **Attachment** is involved in this kind of love and becomes apparent when one of the members dies and this causes sorrow and lamentation in the family.

Filial piety refers to the extreme respect that children are supposed to show their parents and belongs to *Gehasita pema* love. It involves many different things including taking **care of parents**, **burying them** properly after death, **bringing honor** to the family, and having a **male heir** to carry on the family name. According to the Buddha, children can never repay their debt of gratitude to their parents even if they were to carry them on their heads for a hundred years. So He taught the **proper way** to repay our parents with filial piety, loving kindness and gratitude in the *Mangala Sutta* and *Sigalovada Sutta*.

16. Rejoicing in Others' Merits (*Pattanumodana*)

The word ***Pattanumodana*** is derived from the combination of two words: ***Patti*** (merit) and ***Anumodana*** (rejoicing, approval, thanks). So *Pattanumodana* literally means rejoicing in others' merit. The *Atthasalini* calls it 'Thanksgiving' and defines it thus: "*Thanksgiving (or rejoicing in others' merit) as a basis of meritorious action is to be understood as giving thanks with the words* '*Good, well-done!*' *when, for instance, others share their merits with us or when they perform another meritorious act*".

The mental volitions accompanying *Pattanumodana* is thus associated with **gladness (*mudita*)** and right view or understanding, when one **approves** of and **rejoices** in another's meritorious deed. One thereby gets a share of the merit gained by others. By saying '*Sadhu*', we verbally express our approval and thanksgiving thereby making the **other party feel glad** over his good deed. This wholesome volition will strengthen the potentiality of his acquired merit. Thus *Pattanumodana* **benefits both parties**; the doer of the meritorious deed and the one rejoicing in the other's merit. The results of *Pattumodana* are **success, beauty and joy** wherever one is born because its **cause is rejoicing** and **encouraging** others to perform meritorious actions.

The Stingy are Not Happy

King Pasenadi of Kosala once spent a large sum of money in an **unrivalled almsgiving** to the Buddha and the *Sangha.* At that time, two of his ministers were present. One was highly pleased and rejoiced in the meritorious act, thankful for the King's sharing of merits with all beings. The other was displeased and thought that the King had wasted his money on a group of idle monks. When the King came to know of this, he rewarded the minister who rejoiced at the act of almsgiving but banished the minister who did not appreciate the generous act. Taking into consideration their contrasting attitudes, the Buddha addressed this verse to the King:

"*Verily, misers go not to the celestial realm. Fools do not indeed praise liberality. The wise man rejoices in giving and thereby becomes happy thereafter.*" *Dhammapada 177*

17. References

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